

## Ex-lawmaker recalled as old-school South Texas politician

By Lynn Brezosky

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BROWNSVILLE — When word spread of former state Rep. Donald Eugene Lee's disappearance Thursday from the Harlingen assisted-living facility he had joined just days before, community members came out in droves, combing acres of untamed brush with the clue of his last cellphone signal in hopes of finding him. In the end, it was his son, Clayton Lee, who on Sunday found his body in a thicket about three-quarters of a mile from the facility.

The cause of the death remained under investigation. Harlingen police Sgt. John Parrish said there were no clear signs of trauma.

Clayton Lee remembered his father, 78, as one of a nearly extinct type of old-school Texan, a straight-shooter who carried through life the resilience of the Great Depression and went to Austin determined to get state attention to the needs of the Rio Grande Valley.

"I just don't think they make them like that anymore," the younger Lee remembered Monday. "If Don Lee or any of the guys I know like that told you they were going to do something, you could put it in the bank because it was done. You didn't have to follow up."

Born in the oil patch town of Snyder, Donald Lee migrated as a young boy to Corpus Christi and Raymondville.

Lee as an adult worked for an insurance agency and later bought the business.

The Democrat served three terms in the Legislature, starting in 1981. "He was a small-business owner and he was one of those guys who felt the Rio Grande Valley never really got the funding and the services and the consideration that other parts of the state got," Clayton Lee said. "All of his constituent work was toward helping people ... He'd talk to somebody that would call at 2 o'clock in the morning."

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